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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of the re-broadcast of French television news (Le Journal de 20 Heures) as a tool to develop aural proficiency in college students enrolled in a business French course in the United States. Before viewing each 1- to 2-minute news segment, students complete vocabulary exercises and read a relevant newspaper article. After the viewing the segment, they listen to the audio portion of the tape several times, discuss the report, and answer questions in writing about the subject. Four general topics and specific segments that have been used in class are discussed in this paper: (1) foreign trade, specifically a segment on the European Airbus airliner; (2) international marketing, with a report on President Francois Mitterand's visit to Vietnam; (3) the Potain corporation and the current economic recession in France, specifically how the company has tried to preserve jobs; and (4) financial transactions and computerization, focusing on an electronic debit card being test-marketed in Denmark. Specific class activities and exercises for each segment are presented, as well as the advantages of using video in the foreign language classroom. (MDM)

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DEVELOPING AURAL PROFICIENCY SKILLS IN THE BUSINESS FRENCH CLASS

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The French News (Le Journal de 20 Heures) is re-broadcast nightly in the New York and Washington D.C. areas as well as in several other large metropolitan areas. I videotape the program and then choose segments devoted to topics included in my Business French curriculum. Each week I reserve the equivalent of one contact hour for a detailed examination of a particular TV segment. Typically, the segments deal with a specific economic problem, with a conflict between management and labor, with a portrait of a corporation, with an in-depth focus on a particular industry, with a look at innovative products or services, with the issues affecting international trade, or with the ramifications of an international crisis on the economy. There are four segments which I will demonstrate today. The first deals with foreign trade and charges of unfair competition, and the second segment covers international marketing. The third segment focuses on one French company's response to the constraints of recessionary times, while the last segment shows an experiment involving computerization of financial transactions. All are quite short, ranging in length from sixty to one hundred seconds.

Video offers a number of advantages both linguistically and contextually. First of all, in terms of language learning and aural proficiency, the students hear new voices, new ways of speaking. In addition to the anchor, they hear reporters and the

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people who are interviewed by or quoted by the reporters. The students correctly perceive that, just as in the United States, regional, class-related and profession-related accents and linguistic codes exist. In terms of business context, students are able to grasp situations more quickly when they can see them as well as hear about them or read about them. And, without fail, each segment contains some aspect of cultural difference which students identify and want to discuss. The videotape can serve as a springboard for a wide variety of discussions, be they cultural, business-related or language-related.

A TV news program which reports on economic questions offers both vibrancy (it makes everyday business come to life) and topicality (events take place very quickly and textbooks cannot keep up with the changes). But it is problematic in at least four ways: the same images which help define the context can also distract the viewer, the rapid pace of journalistic sound bites can prove daunting to even the most attentive viewer, the lack of interaction denies the viewer any dialogic control and lastly, unlike oral literary traditions, which were organized around continuity devices such as repetition and rhyme precisely to enable the listener to follow along, the TV news offers no cognitive lifeline to the listener.

My objective is to enhance the listening skills of the non-native listener who confronts this kind of oral text by providing appropriate preliminary assignments, by controlling the perception of the oral text and by developing follow-up work which reinforces

the material. These strategies are essential for helping students cope successfully with the combination of unfamiliar context, technical vocabulary and rapid journalistic pace.

What I would like to do now is take you step-by-step through the four video segments. I try to vary the learning techniques for each segment. At the same time I often find that the strategy I use is partially imposed on me by the nature of the text itself.

Segment 1: Topic: foreign trade . A number of possibilities were available including the oilseed controversy between the US and France and its impact on the GATT accords and the crisis within the French fishing industry which recently sparked dramatic demonstrations. However, I chose a segment devoted to the Airbus because the conflict involves the US and Europe and because the students are more familiar with airplanes than with agricultural products. In other words, contextual reasons helped to determine my approach.

I will run through the activities in chronological sequence:

Pre-viewing activities:

Vocabulary worksheet. The students use a French-French dictionary to define meanings. (at home)

Newspaper article. (at home)

Fill in the blanks exercise. (in class)

Viewing activities:

Audio portion played twice.

I then ask students to jot down one idea culled from the audio.

Replay audio.

Initiate a mini-discussion of the ideas suggested.

View video (subtitles on the screen covered over) without writing anything.

I pose 2 or 3 specific questions which I want them to focus on.

View video again.

Answer those questions.

Post-viewing activities:

Provide a partial transcription to work on at home.

Following day, view video and fill in the blanks on the transcription.

View video.

Have students summarize or discuss.

Segment 2: Topic : International Marketing. I chose a segment which reports on François Mitterand's recent visit to Vietnam. The French are actively pursuing the Vietnamese market. Mitterand, the first western leader to be received in Hanoi in 25 years, demonstrates the degree of French interest there. The segment is particularly dramatic given the history of relations between the two countries. I don't have time to show this news report now because of its length, but I just wanted to mention one technique I used which proved to be quite effective. After a few preliminary remarks and exercises, I played only the audio portion and asked the students to be aware of the different voices they heard and to try to identify those voices in general terms, i.e., according to nationality, gender, profession, etc. They were astonished by how much they could determine about a person based

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solely upon a voice. It was particularly interesting because there were both men and women, French and Vietnamese, teachers and students, the news anchor and journalists and, one very recognizable voice, that of François Mitterand.

Segment 3: Topic: Potain and the recession. This segment shows how Potain, the world's leading manufacturer of industrial cranes, is trying to deal with the recession in such a way as to protect as many jobs as possible. I use the same sort of procedures as for the preceding segments i.e., vocabulary work, exercises, playing the audio portion only. However, instead of (or in addition to) identifying voices, I ask students to note all the numbers they hear in the course of the segment. Some reflect years, others sums of money, others percentages and still other statistics. By focusing on the numbers, the students come to comprehend the thrust of the segment as well as the words themselves. I implement a number of post-viewing exercises including a follow-up activity which fits in very well here-- business correspondence.

Segment 4: Topic: Experiments with financial transactions and computerization. This report, entitled "Monnaie", describes the electronic debit card being test-marketed in Denmark. The pre-viewing vocabulary work is essential because of the large number of unfamiliar terms. To reinforce that vocabulary, I have the students do a matching columns exercise in class. Next, I follow my standard procedure of playing audio first a few times and then the video. This segment allowed for particularly good post-viewing activities. I divided a sheet of paper into four sections and in

each section was an image from the video: a tollbooth, a laundromat, a research lab and a credit card being inserted into a recharging device. The students then discussed each "still" and how it fit into the whole text. Subsequent spontaneous discussion focused on 1) cultural differences - much of the US does not have toll roads, credit cards are not accepted at tollbooths, there is a minimum credit card charge in the US, 2) cash versus other means of effecting financial transactions, 3) how banks might deal with the risks associated with the electronic debit card as presented on the segment and 4) the convenience of having access to such a card.

The last thing I would like to discuss is how I organize. Unfortunately, if you want the material to be current, not much can be done far in advance. The selection and the editing and the preparation of worksheets, exercises and transcriptions must be repeatedly done throughout the semester. I had hoped to re-use some of the materials I had used in a previous class a year earlier, but I found that, in good conscience, I really could not. So, I program my VCR to record the French news every night. When the videotape is full, I screen it. Usually there are three or four programs because I tape at the high speed in order to have a better quality image. As I watch the programs, I carefully note the segments (using my own abbreviations) and the corresponding position, in feet, on the tape. If you are not systematic at this point, everything becomes hopelessly lost. Remember, you can't see anything but your own notes. (Twice a semester I require an A/V assignment from my students. They find that organizing and editing

are absolutely essential. They have to tape a number of radio programs or TV programs in order to find an acceptable segment.) Next, I choose segments which correspond to the topics I cover in the course , eg., banking, corporations, commerce, marketing, agriculture, industry. I decide how exactly I want to deal with each segment. I don't like to use the same techniques for every video. I like to try out a variety of strategies. As I said earlier, I often discover that the segment itself helps to determine my approach.

The use of video expands the horizons of the Business French course both in terms of content and in terms of style. Today I have tried to show you how I take advantage of video to develop aural proficiency skills. By controlling the oral text through a variety of exercises I make it more accessible to the students. Depending on the difficulty of the report, I can increase or decrease the pre-viewing activities. My immediate goal is to demystify the text, to show that it can be controlled and managed. Once that is accomplished, comprehension even of highly technical French becomes possible. I also want to encourage students to tune in to the French news on a regular basis, and if that doesn't work to require that they view it occasionally. But ultimately, my goal is the broader one of convincing them that the global economy requires an awareness of other languages, of other cultures, of other points of view and that information provided by a French news broadcast can enhance life both within and beyond the classroom.